WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A network topology for an ATM network, the network topology comprising:

a source network element;

at least one intermediate network element; and

a distributed virtual path connecting said source network element and said intermediate network elements, said distributed virtual path including a virtual circuit originating from said source network element and a virtual circuit originating from at least one of said intermediate network elements.

2. The network topology of claim 1, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network element and terminates at said source network element.

3. The network topology of claim 1, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said

source network elements and terminates at a destination network element distinct from said source network element.

4. The network topology of claim 1, wherein at least one of said network elements is a computer.

5. The network topology of claim 1, wherein at least one of said network elements is a satellite.

6. The network topology of claim 3, wherein said destination network element performs bandwidth allocation for said distributed virtual path.

7. The network topology of claim 1, wherein said distributed virtual path is unidirectional.

8. A method of arranging distributed virtual paths within an ATM network, the method comprising:

establishing a source network element for a distributed virtual path;

establishing at least one intermediate network element for said distributed virtual path; and

connecting said source network element to at least one of said intermediate network elements using a distributed virtual path;

establishing a virtual circuit originating from said source network element; and

establishing a virtual circuit originating from at least one of said intermediate network elements.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of connecting further comprises:

connecting said distributed virtual path back to said source network element.

10. The method of claim 8, the method further comprising:

establishing a destination network element for said distributed virtual path; and

terminating said distributed virtual path at said destination network element.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of connecting further comprises connecting to at least one computer.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of connecting further comprises connecting to at least one satellite.

13. The method of claim 11, the method further comprising the step of:

performing bandwidth allocation for said distributed virtual path at said destination network element.

14. A distributed virtual path comprising:

a virtual path including a virtual circuit originating from a source network element and a virtual circuit originating from at least one intermediate network element.

15. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network element and terminates at said source network element.

16. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path originates from said source network elements and terminates at a destination network element distinct from said source network element.

17. The distributed virtual path of claim 14, wherein said distributed virtual path is unidirectional.